



**House Government Oversight Committee**  
**Chairman Wilkin, Vice Chair Swearingen, and Ranking Member Brown**  
**Opponent Testimony on House Joint Resolution 6**  
**Testimony of Rachael Belz**  
**CEO, Ohio Citizen Action**

December 7, 2022

Chairman Wilkin, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Brown, and Members of the House Government Oversight Committee, my name is Rachael Belz, and I'm the CEO of Ohio Citizen Action. I thank you for the opportunity to present our opposition to House Joint Resolution 6 (HJR 6).

This testimony is presented on behalf of Ohio Citizen Action's 32,000 members and all Ohioans who have a stake in the decision before you.

Since 1912, Ohioans from across the political spectrum have utilized the right to amend our Constitution via the petition process. We have the power of citizen-led constitutional amendments, initiated statutes, and referendums; three abilities that citizens have in only 14 other states. These tools of direct democracy equip us with the ability to check the power of our state government. They should never be taken for granted or seen as tactics that can be modified on a whim.

Yet, under the guise of good-government reform, Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose and members of the legislature recently announced House Joint Resolution 6, a proposed constitutional amendment to increase the percentage of the vote required to pass a ballot initiative from a simple majority to 60 percent. If passed, this measure would appear on the May 2023 ballot, an off-year election with traditionally low voter turnout. To be clear, our lawmakers would be asking us to cast a ballot to reduce our own rights to direct democracy. How can we see this Resolution as anything more than a power grab that makes it harder for citizens to employ a check on the state legislature?

Since 2000, there have been only 16 Constitutional Amendments proposed in Ohio. Of those, 11 have failed. Of the five that passed, three passed with more than 60 percent of the vote. Many have said that HJR 6 is a solution in search of a problem. But supporters of the Resolution do see a problem. Their proposed policies are out of step with what Ohioans want. When you struggle to control the agenda, you must change the rules—even to the detriment of the basic rights of Ohioans.

Some have suggested that this Resolution is necessary to put a stop to the influence of special interest groups to "disturb" the Ohio Constitution. The one and only example provided is the inclusion of casinos

following a vote in 2008-2009. Making the ballot initiative process even harder for citizen groups will have the opposite of this stated desired effect. It will make it almost impossible for anyone except special interests with deep pockets to successfully pass a ballot initiative in Ohio. Special interests do not need ballot initiatives to forward their agendas, House Bill 6 proved that to us. But citizens need a way to take action when our lawmakers won't act in our best interests.

During sponsor testimony on the resolution, there was discussion of encouraging citizens to turn to the initiated statute process rather than amending the Constitution. Under current law, this is a long, arduous, and costly process that requires at least a two-year effort. Even if an initiated statute passes, the legislature can weaken or repeal the will of the people almost immediately. Since this process became law in 1912, only 12 initiated statutes have been attempted, and only 3 have passed. The suggestion that this is a viable alternative is disingenuous at best.

With historic supermajorities in both legislative chambers and unconstitutionally gerrymandered districts guiding our elections, Ohioans should be raising a multitude of questions around a proposal embraced by our elected officials to make access to direct democracy more difficult. That should never be the goal of an elected official. Further, it is not the job description, nor the responsibility of the Secretary of State, the chief elections official, to endorse or invent policy initiatives that will impact Constitutional law and the right of Ohioans to amend their Constitution for generations to come. This is a blatant attempt to control both the policy agenda and the process of direct democracy. There are simply no other reasons for it.

Tools like the Constitutional Amendment process in Ohio have never been more precious nor their defense more important. We see no justifiable reason, after over 100 years, to suddenly make this already challenging process even harder. Supporters of this resolution assert that our Constitution should be protected from the whims of those who want to change it for their own benefit and gain. Yet this is exactly what you are proposing to do in HJR 6.

On behalf of Ohio Citizen Action and our members, I urge you to protect Ohio's majority-rule democracy. Be a voice of the people in a time when we are made to fight for our voices to be heard. Do not lose sight of the fact that you were elected to represent your voters, not to change the rules to erode their rights. Please vote NO on House Joint Resolution 6. Thank you.